



# WHAT GAMES

## DO YOUR CHILDREN PLAY?

Become a Video Smart Parent





## **BECOMING A VIDEO SMART PARENT: AN OVERVIEW**

In recent years, violence has been recognized as a public health issue. The Washington State Department of Health is developing community-based violence prevention strategies to help ensure public health and safety. One aspect of violence prevention is to understand the impact that violent messages in television, movies and video games have on children.

Video games (which include store-bought games, computer games downloaded from the Internet, and hand-held game players) are now a major industry and are very popular. Many games involve coordination and strategy, and may have appropriate educational uses. However, there are also games that use violence as the main theme, and this violence is controversial. The realistic—and increasingly interactive—nature of 3D graphics is the biggest change in today's games.

Reliable research on the effects of violence in movies and television consistently shows a link with aggressive behavior in children. But the new generation of violent video games is only beginning to be studied for possible links to aggressive behavior.



The Washington State Department of Health conducted a detailed summary of all relevant research on the behavioral effects of video game violence that had been conducted up to January 2000. If you wish to access this review, it is available at

[www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/videoresearch.doc](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/videoresearch.doc)

The video game industry supports a voluntary rating system as a way to inform consumers about violent content. However, a recent report from the Federal Trade Commission shows that games rated for mature audiences are being marketed to children (for more information go to [www.ftc.gov/opa/2000/09/youthviol.htm](http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2000/09/youthviol.htm)).

These games are widely available and passed around among friends. Parents are increasingly challenged to monitor and control what their children play. The information in this booklet is intended to raise parents' awareness of the violent content of some video games so they can make appropriate and informed choices for their families.

*Sprinkled throughout this booklet are actual quotes from video and computer game packaging and advertising.*

**“Kill your friends  
guilt free.”**

**Magazine ad for  
Guilty Gear**

## VIDEO GAME RATING SYSTEMS

*A rating system used by game manufacturers can be helpful, but previewing a game yourself is the best way to see if it is appropriate for your child.*

A consistently enforced rating system, similar to those used for movies and television, is not yet the norm for electronic games. Some video, computer and Internet games are rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). ESRB is supported by the entertainment industry, and is not regulated by state or federal government. Game manufacturers submit their products voluntarily for ratings. Not all games are rated. Retail stores do not always enforce the rating system. Many consumers are not yet aware of this rating system.

The complexity of the rating system is determined by the ESRB. There are two separate components to the system: symbols and content descriptors. Symbols indicate what the ESRB considers a suitable age for a player of the game. Content descriptors give more detail on the amount of violence, strong language and sexual references. Rating symbols and content descriptors are usually printed on the back or side of the box, but may be hard to find.

Parents should not assume that the symbols alone will inform them about the content.

## ESRB Symbols



**Early Childhood**  
Age 3 & older



**Everyone**  
Age 6 & older



**Teen**  
Age 13 & older



**Mature**  
Age 17 & older



**Adults Only**  
Not to be sold to anyone under 18



**Rating Pending**  
Awaiting a final ESRB rating

Games rated as suitable for ages six and older may contain some violence and crude language. Games rated as suitable for teens may have graphic violence, suggestive sexual themes and strong language. A game with a Rating Pending symbol may be suitable only for mature or adult audiences.

ESRB uses a similar voluntary system for rating games on the Internet. Many Internet games are not rated. Parents should be aware that Internet “arenas,” such as chat rooms, bulletin boards and multi-player games, allow other computer users to interact with their child. Other players can be of any age and may use harsh language. Some Internet browsing software allows parents to block or set preferences for ESRB-rated Web sites.

## Content Descriptors

Below are most of the ESRB descriptors and what they mean. The ESRB Web site does not give an explanation of the relationship between content descriptors, symbols or suitable ages.

### **Mild Animated Violence**

Depictions of cartoon characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations.

### **Mild Realistic Violence**

Depictions of characters in unsafe or hazardous acts or violent situations in photographic detail.

### **Comic Mischief**

Scenes or activities characterized as slapstick or gross vulgar humor.

### **Animated Violence**

Depictions of aggressive conflict involving cartoon-like characters.

### **Realistic Violence**

Photographic-like depictions of aggressive conflict.

### **Animated Blood and Gore**

Cartoon-like depictions of blood, mutilation or dismemberment.

### **Realistic Blood and Gore**

Photographic-like depictions of blood, mutilation or dismemberment.

### **Suggestive Themes**

Mild provocative (sexual) references.

### **Mature Sexual Themes**

Provocative material including depictions of the human body.

### **Strong Sexual Content**

Graphic depictions of sexual behavior (i.e. frontal nudity).

### **Mild Language**

Use of words like “damn.”

### **Strong Language**

Use of crude cursing and “4-letter” words.



### **When choosing games:**

- Encourage your local video retailers to use and enforce the ratings.
- Look for the rating symbol and content descriptor.
- Use the rating to back up your decision.
- Remember the rating system is only a guide. Read the game description and use your own judgment, especially if you have concerns about a particular game.
- Preview the game before you purchase, rent or download it. Ask for a demonstration. Rating systems may not reflect what is appropriate for your child or the standards you have for your family.
- Look for games that require strategy and decision making, and games that involve two or more players to encourage social interaction.
- For gifts, let the giver know what games are acceptable for your child.

For more information about the rating system, contact the ESRB—

Email: [info@esrb.org](mailto:info@esrb.org)

Phone: 212-759-0700

Write: 845 Third Avenue

New York, NY 10022

[www.esrb.org](http://www.esrb.org)

**“More fun than  
shooting your  
neighbor’s cat.”**

**Magazine ad for  
Point Blank**



## RESTRICTING ACCESS

*The best way to restrict access to video and computer games is to communicate with your children, limit their use and provide supervision.*

There are several ways a parent or guardian can restrict access to violent video and computer games. Some are through technology while others are through parenting and guidance. On the next page are just a few suggestions. It is best for parents to use their own judgment in setting limits for their children.

Older children and adolescents can participate with their parents in developing rules which all agree to and follow.

Discuss your views with your child and listen to his or her feelings.

**“Shoot a snitch in  
the kneecaps, or  
snuff out a rival  
with a single head  
shot and watch  
them bleed to  
death.”**

**On the package for  
Kingpin: Life of Crime**





### **Ideas on restricting access:**

- Have a parent or guardian observe or play along. There is no substitute for parental supervision and positive attention.
- Place video games and computers in family areas, not in private bedrooms.
- Limit your child's access to the computer by using a password.
- Install blocking/filtering software on your computer. This method works for the Internet only and will not block games purchased in stores. For an on-line listing of this software go to [www.smartparent.com](http://www.smartparent.com).
- Remove the mouse and keyboard from the computer when you can't be there to supervise.
- Some games available on the Internet can be downloaded for free. Others must be purchased using a credit card. Games for sale on the Internet often feature free preview samples. Check them out first. Know which games your child is installing on the computer and how your credit card is being used.
- Provide non-electronic activities for your children. This helps give children other options for "play" that encourage creativity and promote healthy development.



## TIPS FOR PARENTS

*What other strategies can parents use? Child development experts encourage parents to be engaged with their children in activities, to communicate clearly, and to set limits and stick to them.*

### 1. Communicate!

- Discuss healthy ways to deal with the immediate feelings of anger, such as talking, or if need be, taking a walk to calm down.
- Listen to your children and be aware of their interests, activities and friends.
- Talk about respecting differences in other people.
- Talk with teachers about how your children are doing in school.
- Develop your own support network. Parenting is hard enough without having to be all alone!

### 2. Set a good example by showing the behaviors you would like to see.

- Use non-violent words and actions to solve problems.
- Use non-physical punishment for your children.
- Praise your children for finding peaceful solutions to problems.



### **3. Develop and consistently stick to family rules.**

- Involve children older than five.  
Explain your reasons for the rules and listen to their feelings and beliefs.
- Older children can help make a list of house rules, rewards and consequences. Post them where everyone can see them.
- Share the rules with parents of your children's friends, child care providers, babysitters and others.
- For older children, discuss and develop clear rules for times when they are left alone.

### **4. Help your children develop a balanced approach to life.**

- Encourage lots of activities and experiences including physical activities, reading, arts and crafts, clubs, and religious or civic groups.
- Plan and go on outings together.
- Support their efforts to develop and maintain friendships.
- Help them feel physically and psychologically safe. Alert them to risks of violence and preventive actions they can take.
- Encourage your children to volunteer in the community so they develop a sense of cooperation and social responsibility.

## 5. Teach your children to be media literate.

This means being able to understand and evaluate what is behind a product, how it is being marketed, what messages are being received, and how to avoid being manipulated. Children are less likely to be influenced by video game violence if they develop media literacy skills.

- Be selective about the media they view, and discuss the influence violence has on them.
- Help them learn to uncover the meanings of media messages, to think critically, and to recognize when they are being targeted.
- Talk about a particular violent act on TV or in a movie and discuss why it happened, how real it was, and possible non-violent alternatives.
- Help them understand how the media can reinforce harmful stereotypes.
- Encourage schools and community youth groups to incorporate media literacy into their curricula and activities.

**“Vengeance.  
Sometimes it’s the  
only answer.”**

**On the package for  
Black Thorne**

# RESOURCES ON VIDEO GAME VIOLENCE

## **Action For Children's Television (ACT)**

20 University Road  
Cambridge, MA 01238  
617-876-6620

Provides information to parents and teachers  
about television viewing and children.

## **American Academy of Pediatrics**

141 NW Point Boulevard  
PO Box 927  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007  
847-434-4000

[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

Provides information to parents and teachers  
about television viewing and children. See their  
recent joint statement with the American  
Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry on the  
impact of entertainment violence on children.

## **Children's Partnership**

1351 3rd Street Promenade, Suite 206  
Santa Monica, CA 90401

[www.childrenspartnership.org](http://www.childrenspartnership.org)

Publishes the *Parents Guide to the Information  
Superhighway-Rules and Tools for Families Online*.

## **ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Children's Research Center  
51 Gerty Drive  
Champaign IL 61820-7469  
1-800-583-4135 or 217-333-1386

Publishes *Guidelines for Family Television Viewing* and  
other children and the media materials.

## **Federal Trade Commission**

FTC Consumer Response Center  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Room 130  
Washington, DC 20580  
Toll-free 1-877-382-4357  
FTC Matter No. 994511

[www.ftc.gov/opa/2000/09/youthviol.htm](http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2000/09/youthviol.htm)

September 2000 report "Marketing Violent  
Entertainment to Children: A Review of Self-  
Regulation & Electronic Game Industries."

**Mothers Against Violence in America  
(MAVIA)**

105 14th Avenue, Suite 2A  
Seattle, WA 98122  
206-323-2303

[www.mavia.org](http://www.mavia.org)

Dedicated to preventing violence by and against young people through education, outreach and advocacy. A national network of parents creating partnerships with school, business and community leaders.

**National Association for the Education  
of Young Children**

1509 16th Street NW  
Washington DC 20036-1426  
1-800-424-2460

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

Publishes information on media violence and young children.

**National Institute on  
Media and the Family**

606 24th Avenue South, Suite 606  
Minneapolis, MN 55454:  
1-888-672-5437

[www.mediafamily.org](http://www.mediafamily.org)

Provides many resources on information about media, so that parents and other caring adults can make wise media choices and understand media's impact on children and families.

**National Parent Teacher Association  
(PTA)**

330 Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

**“Psychiatrists say  
it’s important to  
feel something  
when you kill.”**

**A magazine ad for the  
vibrating WingMan  
Force joystick**



# INTERNET RESOURCES

## **Center for Media Education**

[www.cme.org](http://www.cme.org)

## **Center for Media Literacy**

[www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)

## **Lion & Lamb Project**

(national initiative on the effects of violent entertainment on children)

[www.lionlamb.org](http://www.lionlamb.org)

## **Media Awareness Network: Resources for Parents**

[www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/  
index.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/index.cfm)

## **Media Wise—A Resource Kit for the Media Age**

[www.mediafamily.org/store/mediawise.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/store/mediawise.shtml)

## **National Parent Information Network**

[www.npin.org](http://www.npin.org)

## **SmartParent.com**

<http://smartparent.com>

## **Teen Health and the Media**

<http://depts.washington.edu/thmedia/>

## **Video and Computer Game Report Card**

[www.mediafamily.org/research/  
report\\_vgrc\\_2002-2.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report_vgrc_2002-2.shtml)

## **Video Games and Children**

[http://ericeece.org/pubs/  
digests/1994/cesaro94.html](http://ericeece.org/pubs/digests/1994/cesaro94.html)

## **Washington Attorney General's Report on Youth Violence**

[www.wa.gov/ago/releases/  
rel\\_report\\_041000.html](http://www.wa.gov/ago/releases/rel_report_041000.html)



**Developed By:**

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**To download free copies online:**

Mothers Against Violence in America

Web site [www.mavia.org](http://www.mavia.org)

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(360) 236-3736

**Sincerely,**

**Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team**

# P R I N T I N G   S P E C I F I C A T I O N S

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Become a Video Smart Parent**

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